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ABSTRACT

In the wake of economic and social change in Japan, several lifelong learning initiatives have been implemented. Structural changes such as internationalization, the coming of the information age, and the maturation of Japanese society caused the formerly homogeneous society to become more flexible, paving the way for lifelong learning. Additional changes included a shift in the majority of employment from full time to part time, and educational reform. Japan is also attempting to get the family more involved with children's learning in order to foster unity and individuality. The Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform helped move lifelong learning from the conceptual to the policy stage in the late 1980s. The 14th Central Council for Education submitted a report titled "Basic Maintenance for Lifelong Learning," which outlined needed reforms. This gave rise to the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act, which legally established the Council's recommendations. The Education Administration will lose its autonomy and be gradually subsumed by the General Administration. In addition, local bodies will be prevented from participating in the lifelong learning system, but the private sector will be encouraged to participate. Lifelong learning has taken great strides in Japan, and can be used as a developmental model for other Asia Pacific economies. Contains 20 references. (YKH)

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Atsushi Makino

In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

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Recent Developments in Japan's Lifelong Learning Society

by Atsushi Makino

Japan's recent history has emphasized the development of a strong workforce in support of economic growth, coupled with a population marked by homogeneous values, beliefs and a passionate commitment to the nation. However, all this is changing. The internationalization of the country; the development of an aging society; the coming of the information age at the expense of the industrial age, and changes in the traditional lifelong employment system are influencing the educational establishment and providing the impetus for the development of a lifelong learning system. Reports issuing from the Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform (Rinji Kyoiku Shingikai or Rinkyoshin) in the late 1980s helped move lifelong learning from the conceptual to the policy stage, following which the Central Committee for Education (Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai or Chukyoshin) detailed recommendations in its "Basic Maintenance for Lifetime Learning Report". In turn, this formed the basis for the "Lifelong Learning Promotion Act" which was passed on July 1st, 1990. Although this law has moved Japanese society closer to a broader system of education and learning through the lifespan, the increased centralization of power and the expanding influence of the Ministry of Education have given rise to concerns which are described in this paper.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A LIFELONG LEARNING SOCIETY

Lifelong learning is a concept which has become one of the most important keys for understanding modern Japanese society. In fact, commitment has been made within Japan for the development of a comprehensive, integrated lifelong learning society in which each person's vocational and personal development will be influenced by an open-ended, indeterminate, lifelong educational process. All of this will be orchestrated by the state.

In this process, not only will categories, such as school-centred education and social education (non-formal education) become minor, but they will also be reorganized and actualized through a self-development and self-recruiting system which will void traditionally accepted divisions and roles, thereby making the entire concept of education open and amorphous. The degree to which lifelong learning is affecting the basic nature and structure of Japanese society cannot be overestimated. This paper surveys the development of lifelong learning in Japan by examining

recent trends, government sponsored reports, and legislation.

AN EVOLVING SOCIETY

It is highly improbable that anything as significant as a comprehensive lifelong learning system would develop in any society, let alone Japanese society, unless there were significant changes occurring at fundamental levels. This section of the paper discusses the most notable of these.

Structural Changes

There have been three structural changes within Japanese society which strongly factor into the development of lifelong learning policy. These include internationalization, the coming of the information age, and the maturation or aging of Japanese society.

It has been said that Japan twice experienced internationalization during its process of economic development. First, as a resource-poor nation, Japan chose to become an industrial centre of world importance in order to develop its economy. The importation of raw materials and the transformation of these materials into products for export to overseas markets was the basis for economic development. To this end, the ability to manufacture these products required giving priority to raising the quality and standard of the labour force. Basic education was expanded as well as the availability of technical studies at post-secondary institutions. This effort allowed the Japanese economy, over time, to produce a wide variety of high quality, affordable goods as "made in Japan". In the end, Japanese businesses captured a large share of the world's markets.

The second phase of Japan's internationalization occurred when the Japanese currency, the yen, became one of the strongest currencies in the world. Japanese capital was used for foreign investments and the purchase of overseas real estate in particular. This was also the period of the "bubble economy" in Japan, which, fuelled by inflated real estate values, did not last very long. Japan was called an "economic giant", and many Japanese manufacturers moved production overseas. At this same time, labourers flowed into Japan from Brazil and various Asian countries, as domestic labour had become scarce and expensive.

Currently, Japan is facing a third type of internationalization. This is resulting from the large number of Japanese going overseas and the large number of people moving to Japan. Of course, the nature of this third stage is different from the previous two. While Japanese goods and money were going overseas during the first two waves of internationalization, Japanese society was still comprised of one people sharing the same consciousness and values. This homogeneous, uniform society through its education system trained a homogeneous and uniformly moulded labour force in order to make the first internationalization phase possible. However, when large numbers of offshore people began arriving in Japan, the situation changed dramatically. The newcomers supplied the labour to do the "3-D" work, that which is difficult, dirty and dangerous. This influx brought different values and cultures to Japan; hence, the homogeneity and uniformity of Japanese society was disturbed. This is the basic motif which illustrates the nature of today's internationalization in Japan.

The evolution to an information-oriented society suggests Japan's industrial structure has undergone a turnabout, from manufacturing industries as the economic centre, to an information-based economy, with the computer industry playing the central role. The old industrial framework had two major features that differed substantially from the new network system. First, the pyramid shaped industrial society was based on a strict management control system and quality control system in which distinctions between various levels in the organization were very clearly defined. The information based society, on the other hand, needs to be operated laterally, between equals, and is by nature oriented toward individualism. Emphasis is on efficiency not hierarchy. Second, whereas the industrial society's political structure was centralized, the information society's structures are highly decentralized or come under smaller "sovereignty areas". These factors, when combined with the new wave of internationalization already described, will disturb what has been a uniformly homogeneous Japanese society. Potentially, they will create a danger in so far as national unity is concerned, as economic development and national unity become somewhat contradictory concepts.

The issue of the aging society will also have profound effects on Japanese society. This maturation will see more people achieving higher, academically boosted careers and more leisure time. Indeed, the aging of Japanese society will have the strongest influence on the societal fabric. By the year 2025 more than 27% of the population will be 65 years of age or older, and by the year 2050 more than 32% of the population will be 65 years of age or older (Asahi Shimbun, January 21, 1997). A super-aging society, in which one in four people will be seniors, is on the near horizon. This maturing of society, by virtue of the aging of its members, should necessarily lead the Japanese toward different social values, and the generally higher level of education will improve the ability of people to make better decisions about how they conduct their daily lives.

In summary, Japan is changing from being a "hard society" in which people are united under the same values and awareness as a nation to becoming a "soft society" in which individual values are respected, and heterogeneous people can coexist while not necessarily holding the same cultural perspectives and personal views.

Changes in the Employment Environment

Lifelong employment and seniority, which have been the centrepieces of the Japanese employment system, are rapidly disappearing as evidenced by the fact that the number of full time employees is decreasing while the number of part-time and contractual employees is increasing (Economic Planning Agency, 1985). This change is the result of several factors. For example, the manufacturing sector, which requires highly skilled and knowledgeable workers, has sent many of them overseas, and the growth of the "network society" and the computer industry has put enormous pressure on the labour pool. Hence, there is an increasing need to retrain senior workers in order to cover for the shortage of younger workers. Large enterprises based in Japan have been re-making sections of their operations into small, independent companies, and also new is the fact that many small venture companies come and go within the Japanese economy.

In this new kind of industrial structure, skills and knowledge are not stored inside companies. Instead, it is the technicians and engineers themselves who are the repositories. Moreover, many businesses do not need to permanently retain employees with specific skill and knowledge sets, a situation which leads to headhunting becoming the norm and where white collar workers can quickly find themselves in part-time jobs or even blue collar work. In addition to these changes in the economic landscape, seniors and housewives are entering the working world in large numbers. Thus, a new picture of the labour market has emerged: workers will change their jobs many times throughout their lives and the learning of new skills and abilities becomes a lifelong endeavour. For Japan, this is a radical departure.

Traditionally, individual employees have enjoyed guaranteed lifelong employment and a guaranteed seniority system. Now, however, employees will have to continuously develop themselves while working under fear of losing their jobs. Within the labour market, individualization will be promoted. Necessarily then, there is a need for the maintenance and expansion of educational and training opportunities for workers. Also required is a national policy to inform and unite the nation within this new context.

Retraining and development will not be part of the public education system. Rather, individuals will assume responsibility for their own development at their own expense. The new post-industrial era carries with it the principle that its beneficiaries, the workers, should pay to develop their own skills over the course of their working lives and that national awareness of this fact must be raised. This concept is at the core of the lifelong learning policies coming to the fore today.

The Dismantling of Schools

How, then, have the new working ability and skill development scheme and the new national unity concept been planned, and what kind of structure will they emulate? The best way to answer these questions is to study educational reform and school reorganization.

A report on educational reform and the dismantling of schools was produced by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) in April 1995, and it has since had a strong influence on society. The title, though long, is illuminating: *From School to Community-based Learning Centres: Schools, Families, and Communities Being Aware of their Educational Responsibilities, and Each Giving of its Wisdom and Power to Create New Places to Learn and Grow*.

In the report, the authors identified some of the problems endemic to the school system. Included were bullying, truancy and how the schools have traditionally assumed responsibility for everything from academic instruction to life guidance and discipline. Schools assumed these tasks because of the demands made on parents by the Japanese economy. However, with the current changes taking place in industry, the traditional role fulfilled by the schools will no longer be necessary. The report recommends that the Japanese family, which now has much more free time, along with the community, reclaim responsibilities from the schools, and that all three, the school, the family and the community, should take part in raising children as a combined community based "school".

The boldest reform plan argues that, at school, only language, mathematics and moral education (basic tenets and national awareness of Japan) should be the guaranteed subjects. Other subjects, life guidance, special events and extra-curricular activities should be taken out of the schools and returned to the families and communities, the idea being that parents who now have more spare time can teach and discipline their children as well as take them on family trips to gain a broader perspective of society. The community would provide volunteer activities, clubs, sports and so on, to be organized by local companies. This would give children the opportunity to develop individual identities and abilities.

This argument shows an important turning point in the Japanese view of schools and education. Historically, the Japanese education system was built alongside and in support of the formation of the modern industrial society and nation state, to uniformly train each citizen to be a dedicated worker. The education system, in fact, closely paralleled the manufacturing system. The Japanese manufacturing system, based on Taylor's ideas from earlier in this century, divided the manufacturing process into many steps. Added to this was Ford's assembly line model and conveyor concept. Additionally, overlaid on top of these is the Japanese Total Quality Control (TQC) System. The first two systems made modern manufacturing extremely simple and mass production possible; however, the quality of individual workers was brought into question. In the Japanese TQC system, it is assumed that the quality of labour requires constant improvement in an ongoing effort to improve the quality of the finished product. The system has a very strong labour control aspect. Needless to say, in this type of environment, employee education and loyalty to the work group and company were essential. It was TQC which underpinned the lifelong employment and seniority systems. All told, the analogies with the school system are powerful.

Elementary and junior high school education were assigned the role of inculcating the TQC system. In theory, across all Japanese schools, the quality of the children's education is the same. Effort and desire were viewed as the variables, so if a child had a poor academic record, the reason had to be that he or she was simply not putting forth the effort. The result is a system where children are always competing with each other for grades, or within groups, or against other groups or even other classes in the same school. Hence, the awareness of group identity is strong. Through the school curriculum too, the children are indoctrinated with national awareness and inculcated with national values. This system was the basic mechanism by which national unity and economic success was achieved.

Regardless of what one thinks about this system, economic trends as described earlier in this paper now suggest that the social structure, especially the industrial component, which needed this strong group oriented social acclimatization, must go through a dismantling process. New ways of achieving economic development and national consciousness within an individualized society must be pursued.

In summary, the "Lifelong Learning System" now being promoted in Japan really means constructing a lifelong working ability and skills development system, or, in short, the industrialization of education, based on the principle that the direct beneficiaries should pay for part of it. As well, state unity, formerly realized by a strong

group ethic, will be transformed into one which is achieved through direct loyalty or consciousness coming from the individual.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY IN JAPAN

Starting in the early 1970's, advisory organs of the Ministry of Education issued several reports. For example, in 1971, the Central Council for Education (Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai or Chukyoshin), in the introductory preamble to its report titled *About the Basic Policy for Total School System Expansion and Maintenance in the Future*, argued that, from the perspective of lifelong education, the entire educational system needed to be redesigned. Also, in the same year, the Social Education Council (Shakai Kyoiku Shingikai or Shakyoshin) produced a report titled *The Way Social Education Should Deal With Rapid Social Structure Changes*. In it, the Council stated that home based education, school education, and social education have lost their close, organic relationship, and too great a burden and too many expectations have been placed on the school's role. Furthermore, they noted that there is a great inefficiency and overlap, and argued that any concept of education should be reviewed from the point of view of developing lifelong education. From the outset, then, the concept of lifelong education was placed at the centre of reorganizing the entire educational system. Ten years later, in 1981, the Central Council for Education published *Concerning Lifelong Education*, advising that lifelong education is an idea whose purpose is to help people continue learning throughout the lifespan.

There are two important points to consider here. One involves the use of the terms "lifelong education" and "lifelong learning". According to the Ministry of Education, the maintenance and programming of learning opportunities is referred to as "lifelong education", while from the process or the learner's side it is "lifelong learning". In the report, the Ministry of Education emphasized that this is an equal relationship. However, since "lifelong education" is the fundamental notion on which the system rests, lifelong education (the programming) must necessarily determine the direction of lifelong learning (the learner's experience). Therefore, "education" is foremost to "learning", and the system of lifelong education is as a result led by the state as opposed to being driven by the learners. This has turned out to be a critical distinction.

The second point relates to the notion that prescribed social education functions will rely on private educational providers. This reinforced the principle that direct beneficiaries should pay for part of the costs. Moreover, modifying the philosophical perspective to one of voluntary learning and putting the emphasis on personal benefit opened the door for the introduction of market principles. Needless to say, this shift also lightened the government's financial burden.

From these perspectives, a framework for a state-led lifelong learning system has been created. The principal player is the state and the ethic of the "power to self-educate" suggests that the will for learning and the attitudes and abilities to achieve this will develop within the nation (Central Council for Education, 1983).

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LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE AD HOC COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

It was under the stewardship of the Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform (Rinji Kyoiku Shingikai or Rinkyoshin) that the notion of lifelong learning went from concept to policy. The Council was convened between 1984 and 1987 by the Nakasone Diet as an advisory organ reporting directly to the Diet and not to the Ministry of Education. In this way the broader government administration stepped into an area normally represented by the Ministry of Education. This section of the paper reviews examples of the Council's reports in order to detail the conceptual development of lifelong learning.

The First Report (June 29, 1985)

In this, the Council's first report (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1985), a move toward a lifelong learning system is scarcely mentioned. However, the reasons school based education had so many problems were identified, including the negative influence of the entrenched careerism in academe. A move toward a lifelong learning system of some sort was offered as one of the potential solutions for the negative phenomena in the school system. This report focused primarily on the issue of how to deal with an aging society.

Discussion Summary No. 3 (January 22, 1986)

This summary reflects the preliminary ideas discussed prior to the writing of the second report (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1986a). Included are three important themes. First, there was recognition given to the existence of problems in the current education system. Included were the notions of the school-centred society, the uniformity of values, the collapse of communities, and the changes in family structure (for example, the effect of having fewer children in the nuclear family). These were documented and it was agreed that, when taken together, they created problems in the schools. Second, there were documented problems arising from changes in the industrial structure, internationalization and the move toward an information oriented society. Third, there was the weakening of state unity. This led to the notion of creating a lifelong learning system, but the supports for such a system were not clearly identified.

The Second Report (April 23, 1986)

Following from Discussion Summary No. 3, the second report criticized the school based education system in even stronger terms (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1986b). It also described the weakening of social unity in the face of the "mass society", a condition which refers to the ways in which groups of individuals associate differently after the traditional society has lost its centripetal, unifying force. Japanese society, as described earlier, is about to undergo a metamorphosis, becoming an internationalized, information oriented, mature society. To support this society, education must fulfil two somewhat contradictory functions. On the one hand it must inculcate certain common values in order to unite the society, and

on the other hand it must embrace the multiplicity of values required to impart scientific, technological and other types of knowledge. Hence the report's proclamation that Japan must move toward a lifelong learning system.

The necessity for moving towards a lifelong learning system was supported by three explicit points. First, education has been divided into home education, school education and social education. These categories have been viewed by many as separate entities, each applying to a different age group, when the fact has been that they have been interactive and overlap. All are required in order to produce a rounded citizen. Second, a change in attitude with regard to the infamous "entrance exam war" is required. Japanese society must accept that education is not just for youth; learning throughout the lifespan is needed. Third, many people within the society must acquire new knowledge and technical skills on an ongoing basis in order to keep pace with rapid advances in science and technology. As it turned out, these points played a major role in determining the characteristics of the proposed lifelong learning system. Coupled with this analysis was a description of the need to develop a fair system for evaluating lifelong working ability and skill.

Discussion Summary No. 4 (January 24, 1987)

In this summary, focus was placed on "multiple evaluation" and "systemic flexibility", and the writers criticized the "single-track school system" as being unsuitable for the evolving Japanese society (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1987a). They suggested that a multiple evaluation system was required, along with a "public" qualification system which would recognize qualifications gained through work experience. These reforms were notable within the context of the traditional Japanese style employment system — lifelong employment and seniority-based — and gave recognition to the fact that the old system would have to be dismantled.

The Third Report (April 2, 1987)

In this report, "multiple evaluation" was highlighted in the first section of the first chapter (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1987b). There, the direction of evaluation was described as "horizontal", meaning across companies or across occupational groupings. Reference was also made to parallel standards, an approach that would entrench a fundamentally new employment system based on an open job qualification system. Further, a relationship between off-the-job training and the private education sector was identified, as well as recognition of the importance of vocational training in high schools.

The Fourth (Final) Report (August 7, 1987)

In this report, the discussions to date, as a whole, were summarized and the direction of the educational reform package was firmly set in place (Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform, 1987c).

Summary

The ideas of the Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform regarding the establishment of a lifelong learning system noted that steps needed to be taken to deal with

the coming of the internationalized, information oriented, and maturing Japanese society. First, it was concluded that highly talented people, those who will focus on high-end scientific and technical careers, would be trained in the first instance within the school system. Second, many of the responsibilities which heretofore had been in the realm of the school system would be distributed over the broader society, including the family and the community. As well, the promotion of a "dual track" high school education system would increase the number of options taught and hence mobilize people who exhibit different talents early on in their development. Following formal in-school training, labour training or skills and vocational updating would become lifelong working ability development and be driven by individual initiative. Third, in order to maintain core societal values under a state directed system within this new social structure, there would be an emphasis on "moral education" in elementary and junior high schools. Also necessary is the establishment of evaluation standards within the lifelong working ability and skill development system.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION

The 14th Central Council for Education, the advisory organ of the Ministry of Education, was formed on April 24, 1989. It was established under direction from the then Education Minister Nishioka in order to reform the education system. On June 13, at the 167th General Meeting, the Council appointed a *Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee*. In total, eight sub-committee meetings as well as three on-site inspections followed. At the 169th General Meeting on October 31 of that same year, the sub-committee submitted a *Progress Report on Our Discussions* (Lifelong Learning Sub-committee, the Central Council for Education, 1989), and, later, on January 30, 1990, the Council submitted a report titled *Basic Maintenance for Lifelong Learning* (Central Council for Education, 1990) to Education Minister Ishibashi.

Education and Learning

Background information in the Council's report detailed the necessity for moving toward a lifelong learning system. Included were the now familiar arguments that had been identified by the Ad Hoc Council for Education Reform: Japanese society was experiencing major change, including the maturation of the community coupled with increased disposable income and more free time; the influence of internationalization and information technology; criticism of what was a highly academic career oriented society; and the need to construct a social system in which people could learn over a lifetime and be evaluated fairly along the way.

The report borrowed a statement from the report of the 12th Central Council for Education report: "lifelong learning is based on each individual's will to learn" (Central Council for Education, 1981). In this case, the pre-condition for learning is within each individual. However, it was also expressed that lifelong education would cultivate the desire and ability to learn as well as maintain social education functions. Implied in this view is the notion that "learning" is held in a secondary context to the body of "education". This view supported, albeit vaguely, a rationale for dismantling some of the basic premises of education. The report described lifelong

learning as intentional and organized learning activities which take place at school or in society and include such things as sports, cultural activities, hobbies, recreational activities and volunteer activities. The result was the state, through its educational bureaucracy, intervening in and attempting to control the entire body of learning, including many elements normally considered personal and private.

Intervention in Education

The view that learning should be a secondary context of education led to it becoming a responsibility of local governments. As a result, the lifetime learning promotion centres (tentative name), the core of the lifelong learning system, were to be built in each community. These centres were expected to offer lifelong learning information as well as maintain counselling services for learning; map and track the demand for learning opportunities; plan and develop learning programs; liaise and cooperate with government agencies as well as entrust some operations to the private sector; train leaders and advisors for lifelong learning programming; evaluate the progress towards a lifelong learning system; make courses available to the community; and liaise and cooperate with a "university of the air".

This approach and these activities have raised questions related to certain pieces of legislation including Article 10 of the Fundamental Law of Education and Article 5 of the Social Education Act. Article 10 warns of too much intervention by the educational bureaucracy in the content of education, while Article 5 limits what education boards of local government can do in the realm of social education. Specifically, Article 5 restricts education boards to building facilities, encouraging citizens to initiate and run their own activities, and providing advice if requested.

Education and the Free Market

In the report it was suggested that state control needs to be strengthened; however, it also argued that education should be open to the free market. This latter point was based on the notion, introduced earlier, that beneficiaries should pay for at least part of their learning, and that this would be most effectively fixed through the involvement of the private sector.

Concrete methods for involving the private sector in lifelong learning activities included relying on it first and foremost for the development of education, sports, and cultural facilities — a "lifelong learning activity priority community". It was argued that within each district these facilities should be concentrated in a single centre thereby providing a broad scope of high quality learning opportunities. In order to harness the power of the private sector, it was suggested that a special taxation system and favourable financing opportunities should be considered.

Regardless of private sector involvement, the report left the door open for the central administration to intervene. It also stated that the administration would support private education through incentives, should this become necessary. More generally, the administrative role included cooperating with private educational businesses in order to train lifelong learning leaders as well as to promote the formation of groups which would work as overseers to maintain the quality of lifelong learning programs being delivered by the private sector.

General Administration

An effective lifelong learning system requires strong organizational support as well as effective communication and coordination among various administrative bodies, including, and perhaps most importantly, the citizens for whom the system is to provide benefits. Specifically, there is a need for strong vertical relationships. At the top of the bureaucracy is the Ministry of Education, clearly identified in the report. However, nowhere in the report is mention made of how the citizens will have direct input.

This is a strange omission, as one would think there must be some form of organization established at the local level. Clearly, the special tax system and favourable financing, mentioned earlier, are not within the purview of the local administrators. As well, if the central authority has increasing control over the content of programs, there seems to be little or no opportunity for local influence. Overall, it appears that the local education administration is losing its independence, and the general direction appears to be one of moving towards increasing centralized control.

The Abandonment of Public Job Training

The development of the lifelong learning system is not simply a matter of moving away from a school-based education system or even the reorganization of the education system. It goes beyond that, and includes transforming the industrial structure. In effect, it is a massive reorganization of the national system.

The report discusses "working ability and skill development", where the further development and education of workers would be through off-the-job training. In other words, working ability development would become part and parcel of the private education sector, and individuals would assume the risks and responsibilities for their own learning. The roots of this development can be traced to the educational diversification policy of the 1960's, which did not succeed due to its failure to forecast the demand for certain skills, as well as the difficulties encountered when attempting to train people whose abilities were assessed at too early an age.

The Repositioning of Schools

The report indicates that the role of school based education, in kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school, is to train students such that they develop the desire and ability for self-driven learning. Also, universities, junior and vocational colleges, and high schools would be required to provide various learning opportunities to the people within the community. High schools are located in the centre of this system, and the nationwide goal of a dual track approach within the high schools supports this role.

THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROMOTION ACT

The Lifelong Learning Promotion Act is officially titled "The law to maintain the system to promote lifelong learning". Based on an April 1990 draft from the Ministry of Education, and with subsequent changes following consultation with other ministries, the law was passed by the Diet and enacted on July 1, 1990. The purpose of the law

was to legally establish the recommendations from the Central Council for Education report (Central Council for Education, 1990). Following are key issues related to this law.

Beyond the Framework of Current Education Acts

The first aspect of this law that requires comment is the fact that, although it is designed to promote "lifelong learning", there is no definition of lifelong learning within the document. Nor is there any stated doctrine underscoring the establishment of the law or, for that matter, any reference to the outline from the Ministry of Education completed in the preceding April.

When the sub-committee on lifelong learning of the Central Council for Education submitted its interim report in October 1989 (Lifelong Sub-committee, the Central Council for Education, 1989), the Ministry of Education was considering the creation of a "Fundamental Act" which would include a definition and doctrinal information about "lifelong learning". However, it was concluded that it would be too difficult to define lifelong learning and encode it as a law, in part because of the broad nature of the concept including as it does a variety of institutions and fields such as schools, social education, culture, and sports. Because definitions and doctrinal facts are not included in the law, many government ministries and agencies are not able to clearly define what lifelong learning is and is not, nor can they determine with certainty how the concept relates to other policies (Nihon Kyoiku Shimbun, May 12, 1990).

There were other important modifications, including the exclusion of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health and Welfare from the law. Also, the Ministry of Home Affairs was given some powers to check approval standards. Many other ministries disagreed with the notion of the Ministry of Education, and now also the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, stepping into their administrative territory through the law. In fact, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications openly criticized the Ministry of Education claiming that it was trying to expand its power in an adventuristic fashion under the guise of the lifelong learning concept (Yomiuri Shimbun, May 11, 1990).

Looking at the issue from a different angle, because the Ministry of Education did not, in the end, include a definition of lifelong learning or enunciate its doctrine, it allowed the lifelong learning law to be constructed and interpreted very differently from existing education laws. Practically speaking, lifelong learning is not education in the traditional sense; therefore, it could not be integrated with the current education laws or even the constitution. This fact opened the door for the Ministry of Education to go beyond the boundaries of so-called general education administration. As well, it allowed the Ministry of International Trade and Industry to become involved with educational policy at the national level. There is also some suggestion of other factors at work in that the initial date for the enforcement of the law was July 1, 1990, which was to all appearances deliberately rushed. It can be posited that a connection existed between the choice of this date and the fact that on the very same date there was to be an American assessment of Japan's efforts to open its markets under the "structural impediments initiative".

Education Administration Subsumed by the General Administration

As discussed earlier, the lifelong learning act was planned outside the framework of current education laws. However, it was not constructed to be completely different from them. As the concept of lifelong learning comes under the control of General Administration, the system growing out of the lifelong learning law will be formed within it and will, technically speaking, place present educational laws on a lower plane. Hence, the educational administration will lose its autonomy and relative independence, and through the lifelong learning policy system be gradually subsumed by General Administration.

At the national government level, it was decided that a Lifelong Learning Council would be established in the Ministry of Education to study and discuss items regarding lifelong learning, social education and school education. Also, the council could propose the results of its deliberations and discussions to the Minister of Education and to the chiefs of other administrative bodies, as well as request cooperation from them, if necessary. In fact, this has created an opportunity for the Ministry of Education to step lightly into other administrative areas.

Transforming the Educational Role at the Local Level

In the lifelong learning council system, the prefectural level council is directly linked to the Ministry of Education's council, and a "top down" system is formed. Moreover, under this law, as described earlier, the role of the local governments is very different from what it was under Article 5 of the Social Education Act.

In Article 3 of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act the Prefectural Education Board's responsibilities include: collecting and providing information regarding learning and cultural activity opportunities; investigating and studying the demand for learning and evaluating the results of learning; developing learning methods and programs appropriate to the needs of the community; providing training to leaders and advisors including support and advice to local educational and cultural organizations; administering social education classes and providing other learning opportunities. In effect, the local education board duties in these areas, as stipulated in Article 5 of the Social Education Act, were shifted up to the prefectural level. Under this new law, local bodies are no longer responsible for educational administration; therefore, they are prevented from participating in the lifelong learning council system. The effect is to deny local autonomy or self-government.

Education and the Private Sector

In the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act, the "lifelong learning activity priority community" is described as the basic vehicle for promoting lifelong learning within the community and for involving the private sector. The first paragraph of Article 5 of this law describes prefectures as responsible for preparing the groundwork that will provide opportunities for private sector participation, noting that they may apply for approval for any given project from the Ministry of Education or from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

It is also clearly stated that private sector organizations participating in lifelong

learning activities will receive favourable treatment with regard to financing and taxation. However, this last promise may be questionable in light of certain restrictions, such as stipulations related to public expenditures, noted in Article 89 of the constitution.

The entry of the private sector into the educational market is also encouraged through each area's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Once again, however, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry hold final power of approval. Moreover, to set approval standards these ministries have to consult with the Minister of Home Affairs and other chiefs of related administrative organizations (see Article 6, Paragraph 2 of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act). Plainly, the framework of the lifelong learning law consists of subsuming the present educational administration under general administration and introducing the private sector in a complementary manner.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS AND GOAL

The process of developing a conceptual framework for lifelong learning and bringing this to fruition through policy and legislation has included considerable reorganization along with increasing centralization of responsibilities, expanding the powers of the Ministry of Education, and introducing the private sector into the environment. At best, results have been mixed. Specifically, the role of the Ministry of Education has broadened into areas of general administration, and the concept of education has expanded to include learning more generally, a change which flies in the face of Article 10 of the Fundamentals of Education Act that limits the role of central education administration and guarantees the relative autonomy and freedom of local education administration from the power of central and local general administrations.

The current foundation for a lifelong learning system has been constructed in an atmosphere of crisis management under the cloud of a new economic and social system. While it's true that Japanese society is facing a critical challenge to its traditional social order, and the government is creating new structures to deal with momentous issues, Japan needs to pay extremely close attention to how our lifelong learning system is being developed, and most specifically to the links with and relationships between the labyrinths of general administration. Local autonomy and the individual needs of the people must be recognized and incorporated into any model.

Regardless, what is clear is the fact that Japan must radically redesign its educational and learning system, a process that is well underway. Lifelong learning in Japan will become a fact, and some good progress has been made. To expect perfection may be too quixotic, but, given the importance of the activity, prudence is warranted. For other Asia Pacific economies, the lifelong learning lessons being experienced in Japan may be a useful reference.

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